

# ***Pertussis or “Whooping Cough” Fact Sheet***

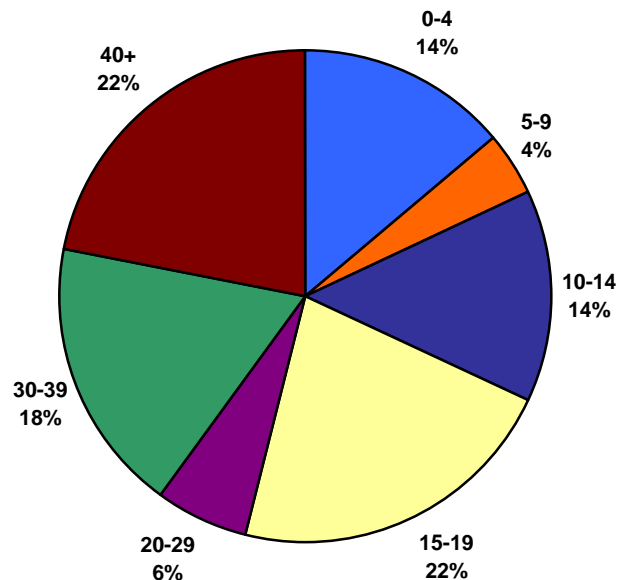
## **What Is Pertussis or “Whooping Cough”?**

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a bacterial infection causing inflammation of the respiratory tract that is easily passed to other people.

## **Who is at-risk for Pertussis?**

Adults and children are at-risk for contracting pertussis. In Placer County, 68% of the reported cases since 2002 have been adults and adolescents who have been diagnosed with pertussis. It is believed that adolescent and adults are susceptible to the disease due to a decreasing immunity from childhood immunization/vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that pertussis accounts for up to 7% of cough-related illnesses in adults each year. The disease is often milder in adults and adolescents than in infants and children. Adults and adolescents who are not diagnosed or treated can easily spread the pertussis bacteria to a young, unvaccinated child, in whom the illness can be life threatening.

**2002 Placer County Pertussis Cases by Age Group, n = 50**



## How do People get Pertussis?

Pertussis occurs worldwide. The pertussis bacteria live in the mouth, throat and nose of an infected person. People get pertussis by breathing in droplets expelled from the nose or throat of an infected person during coughing or sneezing. It is also spread by direct contact with discharges from the nose or throat of an infected person. People become ill about 6 to 20 days after contact with someone who has pertussis. The symptoms during this stage are a mild fever; runny nose and mild cough that usually lasts from 1 – 2 weeks. This is the stage when the person is most contagious to other people.



## What about Children and Pertussis?

Pertussis is a serious problem for newborns and young infants because it causes them to cough, making it difficult for them to eat, drink or breathe. The development of a thick mucous as a result of contracting pertussis is also problematic for children because it may accumulate in the airway causing them to lose their breath, pass out and/or convulse.

Children who do not have all of their shots are at greater risk for getting pertussis because their body is not yet able to fight off the disease. Children are also at-risk because they may be around other children and adults who have pertussis. Parents should contact their health care provider if their young child has had close contact with someone who has pertussis.

## How is Pertussis Prevented?

Getting your child all of their shots for pertussis with the DTaP vaccine is the best way to prevent your child from getting the disease. The DTaP vaccine is protection against 3 diseases: diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis. Children should get 5 doses of DTaP vaccine:

Age
2 months old
4 months old
6 months old
15-18 months old
4 to 6 years old



Unfortunately, most children aren't well protected until they have had at least three shots of DTaP. Since they don't get the third shot until they are 6 months old, it is easy to see why young infants become ill with pertussis. The vaccine is not currently available for people over the age of 7. See your health care provider for more details.

Adults and adolescents may help prevent the spread of the pertussis bacteria by early diagnosis and treatment. Covering the mouth and nose with a tissue while sneezing or coughing, and frequently washing hands may also help prevent the spread of the disease.

## What are the Symptoms of Pertussis?

All symptoms may last from about 3 to 10 weeks. The following information about the symptoms of pertussis is provided by the State of California, Department of Health Services, Immunization Branch:

<i>Exposure &amp; Incubation</i> Incubation Period 5 – 21 days			<i>Onset &amp; Communicability</i> Catarrhal Stage 1-2 weeks		<i>Paroxysms (Spasm)</i> Paroxysmal Stage 1-6 weeks						<i>Convalescence</i> Convalescent Stage 2 – 3 weeks			
Weeks: -3	-2	-1	0+1 (Onset)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Maximum incubation period 20 days*	Average incubation period 9 – 10 days		<i>*start communicability*</i> Cold symptoms: rhinorrhea, conjunctivitis, lacrimation, sneezing, low-grade fever, malaise, anorexia		Paroxysmal cough, vomiting, cyanosis, (and apnea if less than 6 months old)						Coughing			
					Communicability ends after 5 days of appropriate antibiotics			Communicability generally ends 3 weeks after onset of paroxysmal cough if no antibiotics are given						

\* Except rarely up to 42 days in infants and immunocompromised cases

Adolescents and adults and those who have been partially protected by the vaccine may become infected with pertussis, but usually have milder symptoms. Pertussis in these persons may have a persistent cough that may be indistinguishable from other upper respiratory infections. The "whooping" sound is not as common in older persons.

## What is the Treatment for Pertussis?

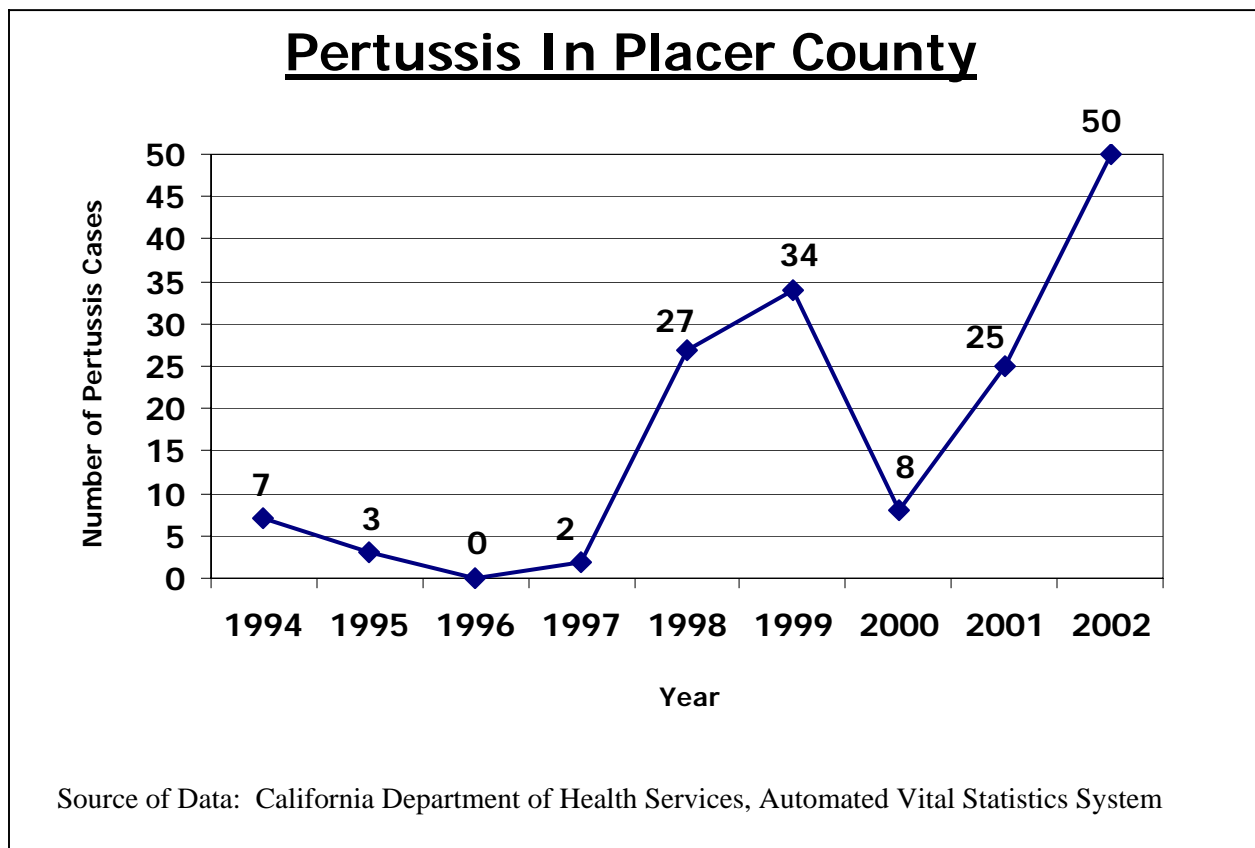
In the first 1 – 2 weeks, doctors may give medicine (antibiotics) to help reduce the symptoms more quickly and reduce spreading the disease to others. Most

children can be safely treated at home. However, younger infants, especially those who are born prematurely, may need to be hospitalized.

It is recommended that children, adolescents and adults with pertussis stay home until they have been on antibiotics for at least 5 days so they will not infect others. Consult your health care provider for more information.

## Is Pertussis in Placer County?

Yes. Unfortunately there has been an increase in the number of pertussis cases in northern California over the past several years. Placer County has had an increase in the number of pertussis cases since 1998.



## What is Placer County Doing About Pertussis?

### ***Placer County Public Health Laboratory***

The Placer County Public Health Laboratory provides analysis to protect the public's health by testing for many



infectious diseases, including pertussis. The lab will assist physicians with diagnostic testing on suspected cases of pertussis. Physicians should contact the Placer County Public Health Laboratory for more information at (530) 889-7205.

### ***Partnering with Medical Providers***

Placer County Health and Human Services - Community Health gives medical providers updated information about communicable diseases and other important health topics through a variety of methods such as, *Spread the Word*, through the Placer County Health Alert Network, and on the county website (<http://www.placer.ca.gov/hhs/>). Community Health also provides training and assistance for physicians and health care providers on reporting communicable diseases.

## **Where Do You Turn For More Information?**

The following websites provide more information about pertussis and links to other related websites.

[Centers for Disease Control Pertussis Website:](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/pink/pert.pdf)  
([www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/pink/pert.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/pink/pert.pdf))

[Centers for Disease Control DTaP Vaccine Website:](http://www.cdc.nip/publications/vis/vis-dtp.pdf)  
([www.cdc.nip/publications/vis/vis-dtp.pdf](http://www.cdc.nip/publications/vis/vis-dtp.pdf))

[Association of State and Territorial Directors of Health Promotion and Public Health Education](http://www.astdhppe.org/infect/per.html) pertussis website: ([www.astdhppe.org/infect/per.html](http://www.astdhppe.org/infect/per.html))

[U.S. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health Pertussis website:](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001561.htm) ([www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001561.htm](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001561.htm)).